

## **"Our Voice, Our Land"**

May 20 -22, 2009

(an ArtsSmart and Living Sky School Division project)



Living Sky School Division has a strong tradition of providing the arts in unusual and innovative ways. The arts help us voice complex ideas and allow us to see situations from various perspectives. For this ArtsSmart project we brought together artists, arts educators and students to make a creative response to the statement "We Are All Treaty People". We wondered what it really means for ALL of us - both as First Nation and Non First Nation members of the community – to be treaty people? How can we use the Arts to share our stories and build relationships through a creative collaboration? How do we connect to the land (where we live) and to our stories (our past and present)? Judy Bear, a traditional knowledge keeper, brought us teachings about the First Nation worldview and helped us understand how Treaties were made. Students brought a stone and a personal story to share with their group. As we get to know one another we break down cultural barriers. We found that we are stronger together. We answered the questions we had through word, song, film, movement and image.

"Our Voice, Our Land" was held at Fort Battleford – a beautiful and historically significant location for our work. We brought in guest artists to facilitate the two-day artistic process: creative and critical thinking, problem solving, connecting ideas and exploring ways to express ideas. Questions, discussion and problem solving guided our

work. It was very exciting to hear students fuse hand drum songs, with jazz, acoustic guitar and hip hop style lyrics. They used the skills, stories and backgrounds of the students to help them create a meaningful piece of music. Students filmed one another as they shared stories of where they come from, juxtaposed with images from the land. Others were painting words and images onto banners, flags and ribbons, which were wrapped onto reclaimed poles. One group wrote stories about the present and the past, weaving them together through memory and dream images, both dancing and speaking the text.

The 50 students (grade 7 to 12) who participated were from NBCHS, St. Vital, Spiritwood High School and Cando. The Arts Educators involved, who helped initiate this project, invited students interested in the Arts to be a part of “Our Voice, Our Land”. Students were asked to choose a discipline and were grouped with artists and teachers over the two days. The guest artists: Michele Sereda (theatre); Holly Hildebrand and Lyndon Tootoosis (visual art); Brad Bellegarde (hip hop); and Gabriel Yahyahkeekoot (film). The Arts Educators were: Paul Suchan (music, NBCHS), Kali Weber (theatre, NBCHS), Shannon McFarlane (film & theatre, Spiritwood High School), Kelly Waters (dance, St. Vital) and Natania Bartlett (visual art, Cando).

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